



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Costa Rican women teachers defend schools, help bring down a dictator, 1919

11 June

1919

to: 13 June

1919

Country: Costa Rica

Location City/State/Province: *San Jose*

Location Description: *Capital of Costa Rica*

Goals:

Fair wages for teachers, a reversal of education budget cuts, and to stop the government's oppression of teachers.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 006. Group or mass petitions › Refusal to be coerced into signing away their salary
- 013. Deputations › Formation of an association of educators to support teachers' rights

Notes on Methods:

The two initial acts of the campaign--the formation of an association of educators, and teachers' signed refusal to give away their salaries--were at an undetermined time in the beginning of June, hence the seemingly short length of the campaign (3 days of protest), although it could have been as long as two weeks.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Teachers (mostly women)
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Maria Isabel Carvajal, Andrea Mora, Carmen Lyra, Ana Rosa Cachon

Partners:

Students at the all-female Colegio de Senioritas

External allies:

Male secondary school students, workers

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Educators

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Students

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1/2 day*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The government of Dictator Frederico Tinoco

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Campaigners set fire to the building of the official state newspaper at the end of the campaign

Repressive Violence:

Police disperse crowd with physical force, fire hoses, and gunfire. Numerous are wounded and killed during the campaign.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Frederico Tinoco is overthrown, putting an end to corruption and favoritism in the education system in addition to allowing for the democratic election of a pro-women's suffrage President.

However, although the demands of the campaigns were met, its success should be moderated by the fact that President Tinoco's fall was influenced by external factors and, after June 13th, the movement was scattered and protests had stopped. Only after his overthrow were women able to reorganize.

In 1917, the government of Alfredo Gonzalez Flores was overthrown in a coup d'état, wherein Minister of War Federico Tinoco seized power and appointed his brother, Jose Joaquin Tinoco, the new Minister of War. During this time the Tinoco regime severely curtailed civil liberties and the freedom of the press and assembly.

At the same time, the country was going through a severe financial crisis stemming from the externalities of World War I: a decline in exports and a rise in debts in Costa Rica. The Tinoco regime's economic policies seriously affected teachers, who were poorly paid and only paid in tercerillas (thirds), bank notes that represented a third of their salary to be redeemed at a future, unnamed time. Associates of the state would purchase tercerillas at half their value from teachers who needed the money immediately before redeeming them for their full value at a local bank. Often times, supporters of the regime were hired as schoolteachers over others.

When teachers protested these policies, Tinoco threatened them with layoffs, firings, and a revamping of their pension plans. Thus schoolteachers began to form the main opposition to Tinoco's rule. Maria Isabel Carvajal emerged as a leader of the movement, instrumental to organizing women schoolteachers.

In early June of 1919, a conference for schoolteachers developed into a meeting to create a national association of educators to protect teachers' rights and lobby for more education funding. The Tinoco regime responded to the group's formation by forcing the directors of the country's secondary schools to circulate a form among educators that would voluntarily sign away a portion of their salary to the war effort.

Instead, teachers signed a declaration against the regime in which they refused to sign away their salaries. A majority of educators in San José signed the petition.

Tinoco issued an order to close the schools and colleges in order to institute a “reorganization of personnel.”

Students from the Liceo de Costa Rica, a male secondary school, marched on June 11, 1919, to the elite, all-female Colegio de Señoritas in support of their teachers. Police stopped their advance, dispersed the protest, and, by restricting street activity, prevented a scheduled association meeting from taking place later that night.

The next day, June 12, Tinoco announced that the school year was suspended, the school inspectors were to be eliminated, and the salaries of the loyal remaining teachers were to be raised.

In response, the students of the Colegio de Señoritas marched to San José’s Morazán Park. They were joined by teachers, students from other schools, and workers. They demanded better teachers’ salaries and a reversal of education budget cuts. Some of the female students addressed the crowd from the kiosk in Morazán Park, and were defended by their teachers when the police used physical force to stop the demonstration.

Police used fire hoses to disperse the crowd, but the demonstrators reformed and marched to the United States Embassy. Shortly thereafter, the police cleared the crowd with gunfire.

On June 13, Andrea Mora, Carmen Lyra, and Ana Rosa Cachón led, with the support of Carvajal, mostly female teachers and students back to Morazán Park. Their numbers grew. They marched on and set fire to the building of the official state newspaper, La Informacion.

Police and soldiers attacked the protesters, firing into the US consulate where some had fled, resulting in numerous dead and wounded. Protests died down after this event, although remnants of the organization remained and regrouped after Tinoco's fall.

Turbulence continued in the summer. The economy continued to deteriorate, Tinoco's brother was assassinated by an unknown assailant, a rebellion broke out in Sapoá. The U.S. continued to pressure the regime as well. In August, Tinoco left the country for Paris.

In the election that followed, Julio Acosta, the leader of the revolutionary movement in Sapoá, campaigned to become President, on a platform including women's suffrage. He won.

The 1919 protest is credited by historians with aiding the women’s movement in Costa Rica. The Liga Feminista was established on October 12, 1923, and would, in 1924, successfully dispute the efforts of male teachers to submit a bill that would exclusively raise the salaries of male but not female teachers. The League tirelessly worked for women’s suffrage in Costa Rica, finally achieving it in 1949.

Research Notes

Influences:

The protests were influenced by a teacher's protest in Argentina in 1918. (1)

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